

RECORDS OF THE CAROLINA PARAKEET IN OHIO¹

DANIEL McKINLEY, Department of Biological Sciences, State University of New York at Albany, N.Y. 12222

Abstract. A review of ornithological and early travelers' reports of the Carolina parakeet (*Conuropsis carolinensis*) in Ohio shows some long-standing claims to be unconvincing. This applies to Audubon (Lake Erie at the mouth of the Maumee), Moseley (near Sandusky), Langdon (a lone claim of breeding near Cincinnati). There appear to be reliable northerly reports for the species from Tuscarawas and Summit Counties westward to Miami County and southward to the middle and lower Ohio valley. Records for southeastern Ohio counties along the Ohio are scarce. A Cleveland specimen (ca. 1863) can probably be ignored, while a late report of a flock at Columbus in 1862 probably warrants more confidence.

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Ohio holds a key place in the former range of the Carolina parakeet (*Conuropsis carolinensis*) in northeastern United States. The following account documents the distributional aspects of the species in Ohio and has been derived from a review of journals and diaries of early travelers and settlers as well as the relevant ornithological literature.

THE MAUMEE RIVER BASIN AND THE NORTHWEST

One reference to early distribution of the parakeet in Ohio has been so often cited that it has acquired a validity that defies its lack of substance. John James Audubon (1831) indicated that some 25 years before (presumably about 1805) parakeets were found at "the mouth of the Manimee at its junction with Lake Erie." Wheaton legitimately construed *Manimee* as a variant spelling of *Maumee* (1882) but neither Audubon, Wheaton nor anyone else has explained the nature of the record, nor whose it was. It certainly was not Audubon's. Nor do any writers previous to Audubon's time mention the Maumee River in connection with parakeets. If Audubon had not specified its "junction with Lake Erie," I might have supposed it a mere slip of the pen derived from Alexander Wilson's (1811) placing the species "at the mouth of the Great and Little Miami."

Later Ohio ornithologists accepted the Audubon report without comment or explanation (Wheaton 1882; Kirtland 1883; Jones 1903; Campbell 1968). Jared Potter Kirtland (1838), who lived at a time when he could have clarified matters, simply ignored it. Charles Elihu Slocum, a thorough student of the history of the Maumee basin, was not able to substantiate Audubon's report. Slocum cited no record for the parakeet closer than that of Gerard T. Hopkins, in reference to parakeets in the Miami valley. Slocum's presumably unpublished "check-lists of mammals, birds, and fishes of the Maumee River Basin," promised in his book (1905), cannot now be traced.

The contribution of Robert Ridgway (1916) to the mystery, was not helpful. His *definite records* included: "Ohio: South shore of Lake Erie (in 1807)"—a date that I am unable to substantiate, even if the geographic information could be sustained. I can only guess that this was an extrapolation from Audubon's statement cited above. It is true that 1807 was the year that young Audubon (with Ferdinand Rozier) went down the Ohio River to Louisville to seek his fortune (Herrick 1968), but Louisville is a long way from Lake Erie.

Another report warrants attention here, although the region is more properly northern Ohio than simply the Maumee and Lake Erie. Edwin L. Moseley

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(1946, 1947) mentioned in a rather tangential way that "when I was teaching at Sandusky (*Erie County*) in the early 1890's, I had a report of a Carolina Paroquet seen six miles south of that city." Sad to relate, the uncertain nature of the report (it would certainly have been the last word on the species in the wild in Ohio) becomes even more troublesome upon closer look. Moseley (1904) published a little note entitled "Notes from Sandusky, Ohio" in 1904. In that paper, it is plainly stated *in strictly contemporary terms* and in the context of a one-page note, where the information is fully discussed: "Webster Ransom reports a parrot that frequented his orchard, six miles south of Sandusky, in the summer of 1903. It resembled a Carolina Paroquet . . ." Published biographical material indicates that Moseley's teaching tenure encompassed both dates mentioned, so a closer look at his life is required.

THE TUSCARAWAS RIVER BASIN AND THE NORTHEAST

The northeastern quarter of Ohio has produced few reports of parakeets. The many pioneer travel journals that I have seen failed to furnish a reference to the species along the shore of Lake Erie. It is noteworthy that Kirtland (1874) was unable to find a single specimen from *northern* Ohio for the museum of the Cleveland Academy of Natural Science. This presumably means that the specimen that had been in the Academy at least since 1860 (see John Kirkpatrick, 1860) was not local in origin. There is, however, an alleged *Cleveland* specimen (Acct. No. 113549, Univ. Mich. Mus. Zool.), a study skin said to have been collected in 1863. The former owner, perhaps the collector, was John S. Collins. The skin may have been from an escaped pet but it is a very dubious record.

The northern sector, strictly speaking, has only one record, that of M. C. Read (1853), who lived at Hudson, Summit County, and who wrote in a catalog of the birds of northern Ohio, "A few years ago a flock of these birds appeared in Tallmadge, Summit County, as I was informed by my friend Rev. Samuel Wright. Have myself never seen them

in the (Western) Reserve." Read's publication date was, of course, no justification for Lynds Jones (1903) to claim parakeets for "Summit County up to 1853."

Summit and Portage counties are, as the latter name especially implies, the northern border of the great Tuscarawas-Muskingum basin. The basin is nearly enough isolated from the southern Muskingum valley to warrant separate treatment here. There are 2 valid reports of the parakeet in the Tuscarawas basin. George Henry Loskiel (1794) writer and historian of Moravian missions, wrote that a "few green *Parrots* (psittacus) are seen in the woods in summer, but are in greater numbers further to the south." It is not clear within this context whether Loskiel meant northeastern Ohio alone. He had not traveled in the country he described. Loskiel got his information on parakeets from David Zeisberger, great Moravian leader and missionary, who had planned to write a natural history of the Moravian settlement of Schonbrun (now New Philadelphia, Tuscarawas County) (Zeisberger 1910). August C. Mahr (1949), a devoted student of Zeisberger, judged that he distinguished between swamps (or bottoms) and higher-lying lands forested with oak-chestnut-tulip-hickory, and that Zeisberger definitely associated parakeets with the latter and only in summer. Presumably by "further to the south" Loskiel meant the lower Muskingum River.

That parakeets may not have been restricted entirely to the summer season is suggested by a second record for the area. Christopher Gist, surveyor and professional snooper in a land promotion scheme for Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia, recorded in his diary for 14 April 1751 the loss of "a Paroquete which I had got from the Indians, on the other Side the Ohio (where there are a great many)" (Mulkearn 1954). As nearly as I can guess, he acquired the parakeet while with the Wyandotte Indians at their village on the Tuscarawas River, five miles east of Coshocton, Coshocton County, where he had been from late November to early December 1750. This is a guess, for Gist had seen a good

part of the present state of Ohio during his marathon trip (Johnston 1898). At any rate, a winter date is indicated.

MUSKINGUM RIVER BASIN AND OHIO VALLEY

David Zeisberger's (1910) "further to the south" takes us into the extensive Muskingum River system that empties into the Ohio at Marietta. There seem to be no substantial reports of parakeets for the southeastern counties along the Ohio.

That parakeets may not have been very abundant on the lower Muskingum in the early days is suggested by a statement of Samuel P. Hildreth (1826), "The paroquet has been seen as far east, on the Ohio, as the mouth of the little Hocking, but is only a transitory visitor." The Little Hocking River (as the Hocking is now called) is in southwestern Washington County, several miles westward from Marietta, where Hildreth settled in early October 1804.

There do appear to be reliable Muskingum references to the parakeet. Milton B. Trautman (1940), in his account of birds of Buckeye Lake, cited only records from Wheaton (1882). He mentioned neither a dubious report by David Jones nor a later record, that was first reported by Oliver Davie (1898). The latter was a specimen taken 9 October 1884, "shot by Mr. A. Lee Hoskinson, near Newark (Licking County), and mounted by S. G. Hamilton." The bird, probably a solitary one, "was seen about the place for several days and was heard screaming all the night before it was killed." It is not impossible, Lynds Jones (1903) observed, that this was an escaped cage-bird. The specimen was in Hoskinson's possession in 1898, according to Davie. It may later have become the property of E. L. Moseley (1946), who mentioned the record briefly. His bird collection, now in the Ohio State University Museum of Zoology, contains an adult mount without data (M. B. Trautman, letter 1960).

THE SCIOTO RIVER BASIN AND THE CENTRAL OHIO VALLEY

There is internal evidence that the Rev. David Jones (1865) had seen parakeets with some regularity in the Ohio

valley in the winter of 1772, before he saw the "last flock of parrots" as he went to the northeastward in early February 1773. Jones wrote on 9 February 1773, "As I passed a certain place called *Great Lick*, I saw the last flock of parrots." (He had been on the lower Scioto and the Ohio since late December and was then on his way to Tuscarawas County.) "These birds were in great abundance about Siota in winter, and in summer 'tis probable they may be seen much further towards the north." I am fairly confident his reference is to the vicinity of Salt Creek in southwestern Hocking County (and a branch of the Scioto River). Gilbert Dodds (1947) equated "Great Lick" with "Great Buffalo Lick" at Buckeye Lake, northern Fairfield or southern Licking County; if correct, the record belongs in the Muskingum valley, as noted above.

In late July 1808 Fortescue Cuming (1810) observed, at the mouth of the Scioto at the tavern of John Brown of Portsmouth, "vast numbers of beautiful large, green paroquets, which our landlord, squire Brown, informed us abound all over the country. They keep in flocks, and when they alight on a tree, they are not distinguishable from the foliage, from their colour."

As for winter, "In descending the river Ohio, by myself, in the month of February (really early March), I met with the first flock of Parakeets at the mouth of the Little Sioto," wrote Alexander Wilson. That stream empties into the Ohio in Scioto County, a few miles east of the mouth of the Scioto. Wilson was a keen and enthusiastic observer, so there can be little doubt that, at least for the year of 1810, roughly the eastern half of the southern border of Ohio was without parrots. Wilson (1811) was told, however, "by an old and respectable inhabitant of Marietta, that parakeets were sometimes, tho rarely, seen there." As a matter of fact, the earliest report of parakeets wintering on the Ohio seems lost in the miasmas of undocumented pioneer times. Thomas Jefferson (1894) claimed in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (first published 1781) that "Paroquets even winter on the Sioto, in the 39th degree of latitude."

The mouth of the Scioto seems to have been a sort of "watershed" for parakeets. There is an archeozoological record for Scioto County at the mouth of the river (McKinley 1977). Morgan Neville, reporting on a trip from Pittsburgh to Cincinnati, noted that Blennerhasset's Island, 14 miles below the mouth of the Muskingum, was not within "the region of paroquets" (Hall 1829). That put a sort of literary seal upon the careful observations, already cited, prepared for Caleb Atwater by S. P. Hildreth (1826). Audubon (1831) said that the parakeet was "at the present day found very uncommonly higher than Cincinnati, and not really abundantly until you reach the mouth of the Ohio" (that is, southern Illinois).

Audubon's observations seem to have coincided with those of Kirtland (1838) who wrote in the late 1830s that parakeets "do not usually extend their visits further north than the Sciota." Kirtland (1883) noted later (he lived from 1793 to 1877), that in the period following 1810, the "parroquet was very common in the Miami & Sciota valleys." He had also noted in the margin of his copy of Nuttall's *Manual of Ornithology*: "A few were found at Portsmouth as late as 1830" (Christy 1936).

At almost the same time Kirtland was publishing his initial observations, in the first state-wide list of Ohio birds, pioneering historian Caleb Atwater (1838) noted, "A few years since paroquets, in large flocks lived in the woods, along the Scioto river, upwards from its mouth, to where Columbus now stands. They are still in the woods along the bottoms below Chillicothe . . ." (that is, Ross County, on the lower Scioto). Atwater, an interested observer of nature, had lived in Circleville, Pickaway County, since 1814. Just what year he meant, however, is not known, for he had been working on his history since 1818 (Skardon 1964).

The second general list of Ohio birds was written by John Maynard Wheaton (1861). In it, he did little more than have Kirtland say that the parakeet did not extend its migrations into Ohio any longer. This eliminated the species as an extant Ohio bird. Wheaton's (1875)

next paper, however, referred to it as that "rare visitor," thus, by implication, putting the species *back* onto the Ohio list. The reason for the change became apparent in Wheaton's fully annotated account of Ohio bird life published in 1882. He had obviously never seen the bird himself (he was born about 1841); but William S. Sullivant, a well-informed ornithologist and botanist who knew parakeets well, "informed me that in July, 1862, a flock numbering from twenty-five to thirty made their appearance in the Capitol Square of this city (Columbus) and remained in the elm trees opposite his residence for a couple of hours" (Wheaton 1882; preface date 1879).

Ridgway (1916), for some reason, placed a question mark following this record. Kirtland (1883) apparently never heard of it at all before his death in 1877; among his last published papers is the statement that "Not a solitary bird of this species has perhaps been seen within the State during the last thirty years." Since it is possible that Sullivant's observation was not generally known until Wheaton's definitive work appeared, this ought not to be construed as a contradiction of it. With this to guide him, a later ornithologist summed up the situation for middle southern Ohio by saying "common resident till 1840, since then extinct" (Henninger 1902). I believe, however, that Sullivant's record cannot be so handily dismissed.

THE MIAMI RIVER SYSTEM AND THE WESTERN OHIO VALLEY

Kemsies and Randle (1953), in their account of birds of southwestern Ohio, state that the parakeet was "once very common during the spring and summer in this area." I doubt that there is substantial evidence for their seasonal qualification. One early pioneer reminisced that in the spring of 1792 "flocks of paroquets were seen, decked in their rich plumage of green and gold," as they sported among redbud and dogwood in bloom near the mouth of the Miami in Hamilton County (Howe 1847); this hardly denies the presence of parakeets in winter.

Having just descended the Ohio from the Pittsburgh region, beginning 6 June 1796, the Frenchman Victor Collot (1924) "saw here, for the first time, several small paroquets of the green species, with yellow necks." Collot was at "Big Bend Station," barely within Hamilton County. The summer restriction placed upon the species by his hosts need not, of course, be taken seriously: Collot had expressed *surprise* at seeing them and that would have laid him open to elaborate homespun tales.

Gerard T. Hopkins, a Quaker missionary from Baltimore, traveled to Fort Wayne in 1804, leaving his home city in February. He began his horse-back trip across Ohio from Short Creek, Jefferson County. He was an exceptionally alert and interested man and left one of Ohio's most valuable early travel accounts. Hopkins saw no parakeets either anywhere in the whole eastern and central part of Ohio or on the Miami until he had ascended the latter stream to the vicinity of present Piqua, Miami County, where on 26 March he noted: "Towards the close of this day, we saw an immense flock of birds alighting in the trees, different in appearance from any we had seen. Our landlord informed us they were parrots and that they were common on the Great Miami." Hopkins (1862) went on to describe them, basing his description on one shot by the landlord, "to satisfy our curiosity." I gather that the landlord did not think of that flock as being the first to appear that spring.

Slocum (1905) mentioned Hopkin's report placing the observation at Dayton but I have little doubt that he was incorrect. (I was helped in reaching this decision by Leonard U. Hill, Miami County historian.) In either case, of course, it is the most northerly of records for the western quarter of Ohio—unless Audubon's Maumee mouth claim, as already noted, can be validated. It must be recalled, in this regard, that Audubon also mentioned that the species had formerly been found on "the heads of the Miami" (1831) but again without substantiating his remark.

There is another southwestern but somewhat inland record for the parakeet. In August 1806, while at or near Lebanon,

Warren County (and therefore on the Little Miami), Thomas Ashe reported parakeets. Ashe (1808) was verbose and often unreliable but there is no reason to doubt his veracity in this case: "During the repast"—he had just made opportunist's pie of a large snapping turtle—"I was entertained by the chattering of a flock of paroquets, who had taken up their abode in the trees around me."

After seeing his first parakeets at the mouth of the Scioto, as described above, Alexander Wilson (1811) later reported flocks "at the mouth of the Great and Little Miami" in mid-March, probably an indication that they did not appear in numbers (at least that year) until one descended the Ohio to the vicinity of Cincinnati. Kirtland's (1883) comments upon parakeets on the Miami are vague (Christy 1936). It is unfortunate that Daniel Drake (1810, 1815) did not leave more specific information on the status of parakeets about Cincinnati, for he knew the region well from an early date. By about 1830 or before Audubon was writing that parakeets were not really plentiful as high up the Ohio as Cincinnati. He alleged they had been commoner 25 years earlier (1831) but I am skeptical that they were very common there (most of the time).

Edwin James (1823), using notes written by naturalists of the Long expedition for 18 May 1819, wrote of the bottomlands just below Cincinnati that "the fruit of the sycamore is the favourite food of the paroquet, and large flocks of these gaily-plumed birds constantly enliven the gloomy forests of the Ohio." He published no detailed notes on where they had been seen on the river in the party's descent.

There are some vivid allusions to parakeets in Timothy Flint's (1826) memories of the winter of 1815–1816 in Cincinnati. Cincinnati was a new sprung city, in whose rich and abundant markets he numbered among the things for sale "cages of red-birds and parroquets"; both species were no doubt local in origin. Flint left Cincinnati in March 1816, his Yankee mind much impressed by the "favorableness of nature and convinced of the greatness of the region's future." Yet he did not fail to look hard at what

was happening to the primeval habitat where "flocks of parakeets are glittering among the trees, and grey squirrels are skipping from branch to branch."

Aside from Kirtland's vague notes, the matter of parakeets in the Miami River region becomes obscure until resurrected by Frank W. Langdon (1877). While otherwise offering nothing new, he mentioned that parakeets had been seen at Madisonville, near Cincinnati, Hamilton County, in 1837, 1838 and 1839. In a supplement to that list, Langdon (1878) identified his informant: "Mr. Joseph Settle tells me that Paroquets occurred in large numbers near Madisonville, during the summer of 1837, '38 and '39. Few were seen in 1840, and none after that year." He then went on: "Mr. Dury notes, on the authority of Giles Richards, Esq., their occurrence in large numbers at Matson's Mills, near Venice, Butler Co., Ohio; Mr. Richards pointing out the identical sycamore in which they had nested many years ago."

The latter statement requires some modification. Charles Dury himself never saw parakeets in Ohio (he was born in 1847) and had not heard of any near Cincinnati after 1840. Giles Riebands (*not Richards*) pointed out to Dury "a huge sycamore tree, having a large cavity on one side, about 60 ft. from the ground. In this cavity he said he had seen flocks of Paroquets fly at dusk in the evening to roost for the night." "Mr. Riebands thought the birds nested in the cavities of sycamores along the Miami" (Dury letter to U.S. Biological Survey, 1923). Aside from the informant's name, Langdon was also wrong in saying that he pointed out a nesting tree. Neither point seems to have changed the public record, an example of which is Hicks's (1935) statement that it was a breeding record for Ohio. There appears, in fact, to be no nesting record for the state.

Raymond W. Smith (1891) did not further document his assertion that the parakeet had formerly been an abundant summer resident in Warren County, northeast of Cincinnati, "breeding within the memory of persons now living," but by then extinct for many years. There is, however, an archeozoological record of

two upper mandibles of the parakeet from a prehistoric site in Warren County (Trautman and Trautman, 1968).

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